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POLLWATCHERS

Their Rights and Limitations



Illinois law provides for pollwatchers to be present in the polling place during an election. Pollwatchers are intended to observe the conduct of the election and their prime concern is the integrity and fairness of the election.

WHAT ARE POLLWATCHERS?

The great majority of election officials are honest and dedicated; however, even the most honest election officials can make mistakes. Pollwatchers sometimes referred to as challengers, checkers or simply watchers, are election observers who aid in ensuring the free and fair conduct of elections. Pollwatchers may be in the polling place before the polls open, during the actual voting hours, and after the polls close.

WHAT ARE THE QUALIFICATIONS NECESSARY TO BECOME A POLLWATCHER?

A pollwatcher must be registered to vote in the state of Illinois and must be affiliated with the political party he/she is representing. (In primary elections, candidates are allowed 2 pollwatchers per precinct.)

WHO AUTHORIZES AN INDIVIDUAL TO BECOME A POLLWATCHER?

Pollwatchers may represent established political parties, candidates, qualified organization of citizens, or organized proponents or opponents of ballot propositions. Each pollwatcher must have credentials issued by the election authority, and these credentials must be presented by the pollwatcher to the election judges immediately upon entering the polling place.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE SPECIFIC RIGHTS OF POLLWATCHERS?

- Before the first ballot is cast, pollwatchers may observe that the ballot box is empty;
- Pollwatchers may position themselves near enough to the election judges to examine the applications for ballot;
- Pollwatchers may observe as the judges compare the voter applicant's signature on the application with the signature on the registration records;
- Pollwatchers may watch as the judges initial and distribute the ballots to voter, and as the judges deposit the ballots into the ballot box after the voter has voted;
- Pollwatchers may challenge a person's right to vote. A reason for the challenge must be stated. (Possible reasons include; the person voted earlier in the day, the person moved, or the person lacks qualifications);
- The judges of election determine whether or not to sustain a challenge;
- Pollwatchers may observe the counting procedures after the polls close. This includes the validation and counting of provisional votes.

WHAT SHOULD A POLL-WATCHER DO IF HE OBSERVES AN ADMINISTRATIVE ERROR OR SEES AN APPARENT VIOLATION ON THE PART OF ELECTION JUDGES OR VOTERS?

The pollwatcher should politely inform the election judges if he observes an error or an apparent violation. If the error or violation continues, the pollwatcher should record his/her observations, immediately contact the election authority and remain at the polling place until proper authorities arrive. Under no circumstances should a pollwatcher argue with the election judges or interfere with the election process.

IS THERE A LIMIT TO THE NUMBER OF POLLWATCHERS ALLOWED IN A POLLING PLACE?

When over-crowding interferes with the orderly conduct of the election, the judges of election may limit the number of pollwatchers. The election judges may cause the removal of any pollwatcher who is disrupting the election process.

YOU CAN HELP TO PREVENT VOTE FRAUD BY REPORTING UNUSUAL ACTIVITIES OR IRREGULARITIES IMMEDIATELY TO THE ELECTION JUDGES AND/OR THE APPROPRIATE AUTHORITIES.

REMEMBER.....

Pollwatchers are official observers only. They may observe the conduct of the election before, during, and after the polls close. All pollwatchers must present valid credentials upon entering the polling place.

The judges of elections are the sole authority in the polling place on election day.

No person, except a judge, may handle or touch election supplies and materials.

A police officer may be in the polling place to preserve order and carry out lawful directions given by the judges.

Electioneering or any type of campaigning must not take place within the Campaign Free Zone.

The publication *A Guide for Pollwatchers* outlines the necessary qualifications and responsibilities of pollwatchers. The pamphlet, *Preventing Vote Fraud* spells out some telltale signs of possible voting irregularities that should be reported to the election judges and/or election authorities.

Where ballots are counted in the office of the election authority, each political party, candidate, and qualified civic organization shall be entitled to have one pollwatcher for each panel of election judges.

Pollwatchers shall be permitted to observe all proceedings and view all reasonably requested records relating to the conduct of the election, provided the secrecy of the ballot is not impinged.



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Pollwatchers may be appointed to observe early voting by personal appearance at each permanent and temporary polling place where early voting is conducted.

The primary goal of the State Board of Elections is to help bring about greater understanding and participation in the electoral process.

For more information on election laws and procedures, write or call the State Board of Elections



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